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BY NORMAN D. SANDLER

WINTERSET, IOWA (UPI) -- PRESIDENT REAGAN SAID SATURDAY A FAULTY TRANSLATION MIGHT HAVE LED PEOPLE TO THINK THAT THE CIA WAS ADVOCATING ASSASSINATIONS IN NICARAGUA, BUT PREDICTED THE CONTROVERSY EVENTUALLY WILL BE JUDGED "ALL A GREAT BIG SCARE."

"THERE WAS NOTHING IN THAT MANUAL THAT TALKED ASSASSINATION AT ALL," HE TOLD REPORTERS WHILE VISITING THE CHILDHOOD HOME OF THE LATE ACTOR JOHN WAYNE.

THE MANUAL, PREPARED BY THE CIA FOR REBELS FIGHTING THE MARXIST GOVERNMENT IN NICARAGUA, CALLED FOR "NEUTRALIZING" GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. MANY INTERPRETED THE WORD TO MEAN POLITICAL ASSASSINATION.

"I SUPPOSE YOU COULD CONSTRUE IT IN SEVERAL WAYS," REAGAN SAID. "THE REAL WORD WAS 'REMOVE,' MEANING 'REMOVE FROM OFFICE.'

THE PRESIDENT SAID THE MANUAL, AS WRITTEN IN ENGLISH SAID, "IF YOU CAME INTO A VILLAGE OR TOWN, REMOVE FROM OFFICE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SANDINISTA GOVERNMENT."

HOWEVER, HE SAID, "WHEN THEY TRANSLATED IT INTO SPANISH, THEY TRANSLATED IT 'NEUTRALIZE' INSTEAD OF 'REMOVE,' BUT THE MEANING STILL REMAINS THE SAME."

THE PRESIDENT SAID HE HAD NOT SEEN THE MANUAL, BUT CONTENDED HE KNEW "ENOUGH ABOUT THE REPORT" TO CONCLUDE THAT THE MATTER HAD BEEN EXAGGERATED.

"I THINK YOU'RE GOING TO FIND THAT IT WAS ALL A GREAT BIG SCARE AND THAT THERE WAS NOTHING IN THAT MANUAL THAT HAD ANYTHING TO DO WITH ASSASSINATIONS OR ANYTHING OF THAT KIND," HE SAID.

REAGAN DENIED THAT THE WHITE HOUSE IS HOLDING BACK A REPORT INTO THE AFFAIR AND STRESSED THAT THE MATTER STILL IS UNDER REVIEW BY HIS THREE-MEMBER INTELLIGENCE OVERSIGHT BOARD.

CIA DIRECTOR WILLIAM CASEY, WHO RECEIVED A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE FROM REAGAN DURING A BRIEF QUESTION-AND-ANSWER SESSION WITH REPORTERS, TOLD MEMBERS OF THE SENATE AND HOUSE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEES IN AN OCT. 25 LETTER THAT THE "THRUST AND PURPOSE" OF THE MANUAL WAS "ON THE WHOLE, QUITE DIFFERENT FROM THE IMPRESSION THAT HAS BEEN CREATED IN THE MEDIA."

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